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**REMARKS
BY
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH DAN MOZENA
REGIONAL CONFERENCE
ON COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM THROUGH STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATIONS
RUPOSHI BANGLA HOTEL, DHAKA**

JANUARY 16, 2012

Honorable Tarique Ahmed Siddique, Security Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister, Honorable Monzur Hossain, Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Dr. Paul Clarke, Program Coordinator, Center for Civil-Military Relations, Amb. Farooq Sobhan, President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, gracious host of this event, font of great wisdom, and treasured friend, Good morning!

As many of my Bangladeshi friends know, I grew up on a dairy farm and spent the first decades of my life milking cows and doing the daily chores that go with the grinding life of a family farm. Like farm people around the world, I know only simple, direct talk, which makes me an awful diplomat, I am sure. In any case, President Obama hasn't gotten around to firing me yet, so I have this opportunity today to address the inaugural session of this timely and crucial conference, which I am pleased that my government is helping to sponsor.

Like many of you, I am a professional conference go'er. I long ago lost count of how many conferences I have attended. I must confess that during some of these conferences my mind wandered as I drifted into a state of mental suspension. Sadly, none of us has that luxury during this conference ... the stakes are simply too high.

No nation represented in this room is immune from terrorism. Terrorism is not simply somebody else's problem. It is a threat to each of our countries individually and to all of us collectively as a community of states that is working to build moderate, tolerant, prosperous, free

societies, societies that respect the human rights of our citizens, societies that seek to create circumstances that allow each citizen to achieve his or her own potential, societies that enable citizens to provide a better future for their children.

We must not delude ourselves, however, in believing that our vision is shared by all. At this very moment, as we deliberate in this hall, there are others who are plotting to destroy the very societies that we seek to build. Since the harsh, intolerant, non-democratic societies they seek are inimical to human nature, they endeavor to impose their extremist ideology through violence. Thus, the battle is defined. If we believe in a free, open, tolerant society, if we wish for our children to inherit such a society, then we must fight to defend our values. Fighting to defend what we believe in is not a new concept for any of you.

The fight against violent extremism is complex, involving a combination of hard and soft power. Soft power is, in my view, our most powerful weapon. The key to our victory is denying terrorists fertile ground to sow their seeds of hatred and intolerance. To this end, I believe hope is the crucial element. I believe that people with hope will not be drawn to radicalized ideologies. People with hope that tomorrow will be better than today, people with hope that their children have a bright future ... these people will not be seduced by the empty promises of violent extremists.

If you accept my thesis that hope is key to countering radicalization, then the obvious question arises: What can we do to instill hope among the people?

Rather than attempt to answer that question in the abstract, I propose to do so by examining America's priorities here in Bangladesh. Among our highest objectives here is advancing Bangladesh as a moderate, tolerant, free and democratic alternative to violent extremism. To achieve this goal, America promotes a Bangladesh that is peaceful, secure, prosperous, healthy and democratic. Our partnership with Bangladesh, which this year totals more than \$182 million, focuses on helping Bangladesh create such a nation. As our partnership builds to this end, I believe the environment in Bangladesh will become ever less hospitable to those who preach hate and intolerance.

Our partnership with Bangladesh is largely played out at the local, grassroots, people-to-people level. This partnership, which strives to bring hope to the wondrous people of this nation, has marked great progress on many fronts:

- Bangladeshi families are now better able to have the family size they seek, as the fertility rate has dropped by over 50%.
- Maternal mortality has dropped by 40% and child mortality by 50%.
- Bangladeshis are better protected from cholera, TB and HIV/AIDS.
- Farmers are learning to adapt to the effects of climate change as they increase production to help improve food security.
- Police are learning how to engage with the communities they are charged to protect, and prosecutors are becoming better able to bring cases to court, thus diminishing the need for vigilante justice.
- The country can better withstand natural disaster thanks to the hundreds of massive cyclone shelters that the partnership has built and to expanded disaster preparedness.
- Bangladesh is developing a version of the Navy Seals to provide maritime security and the nation now better protects its land borders and other points of entry into the country.
- Bangladesh is developing a capacity to create a whole of government response to violent extremism to reduce the interagency stovepipes that reduce effectiveness in fighting terrorism.

This list of the partnership's achievements goes on and on, but I think that I have made my point: Bangladesh has made great strides in bringing hope to the people, thus countering the ideology of violent extremism. I offer the Bangladesh experience only as a case study of what can be done to bring hope to the people. I know that what is happening here in Bangladesh is happening all across the region. The key now is to link these efforts into a regional partnership, because terrorists know no borders, and we cannot be constrained by them either.

Violent extremists manipulate the ills of society to promote their own agenda. Thus, efforts to address these societal shortcomings deny space to the terrorists and are crucial to countering the narrative of those who advocate violence. Ultimately, strategic communication, the subject of this conference, works best when it has a positive story of hope to share and document with the people.

You carry a heavy burden. In this conference you are charged with exploring how strategic communication works best in countering violent extremism. You will no doubt share your experiences and lessons learned as you endeavor to create concrete plans both on how your

respective countries can best use strategic communication and on how you collectively can best work in the regional context to coordinate your endeavors for maximum effectiveness in countering the shared terrorist threat.

As you carry out these challenging tasks, I hope you will consider as well the importance of the context in which you are endeavoring to use the strategic communication tool. I believe a context in which people have hope for themselves and for their children will be much more receptive to strategic communication.

I wish you well as you undertake your important work, and, Farooq, thanks so much for inviting me to participate in this inaugural event.

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GR/2012